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9th Dec., 1932

Major F. W. Gerrard, C.I.E.,
Office of Commissioner of Police.

My dear Gerrard,

I am much obliged for the very excellent review
on "Contested Documents and Forgeries" received yesterday.
Will you please convey my thanks to the reviewer. It will
appear on our book Page on Tuesday.

Yours sincerely,

G. Howard

Editor

Sup. Gilbert for information.

*I am glad to review your book
is so appreciative.*

(KRB)

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CONTESTED DOCUMENTS AND FORGERIES.

By F. BREWESTER.

The volume under review is one of the most lucid works that has been published on this much written about and still more widely discussed subject.

The author's chapters on handwriting production and development are written in so plain a language, avoiding as far as possible, the use of technical terms, that no previous knowledge of the subject is required to understand it. He also very successfully refrains from committing a fault common to most writers on handwriting who generally begin with clear and concise information regarding the formation of handwriting, following it up to maturity, and then suddenly merge into realms of psycho-analysis without clearly explaining how to tell genuine writing from a spurious one, or giving any tangible clue as to methods of proving it.

Mr. Brewester strictly adheres to the title of his book and gives a full but simple explanation of the work confronting a handwriting expert in proving forgery, etc. in a Court of Law, and in addition puts his readers in possession of knowledge wherewith to prove his assertions. Moreover he does not minimize the responsibility of an expert and takes the trouble to show that many persons, posing as experts, are absolutely unqualified and thus greatly jeopardize the value of opinion by a real expert when he is called upon to give evidence.

The chapter dealing with seals and impressions is very likely to make many dubious about putting as much faith in this form of security as they might have done heretofore.

In the chapter on finger prints as a means of identification, the author seems inclined to be rather doubtful in upholding the belief that no two finger prints of different persons are ever identical. He does admit, however, that failure to find two alike in all the millions which have been examined justifies the assumption that there are none identical. No finger print expert can find fault with this assertion, but in the face of the author's definite statement in the first chapter of his book that "No two persons ever write precisely alike" the question arises as to whether this can be as definitely laid down vis a vis the "no two alike" theory regarding finger prints being assumed only in the absence of proof to the contrary. The same theory should, therefore, hold good in the matter of handwriting as it is not impossible that even more finger prints than documents in handwriting have been compared for identification purposes.

The foregoing is only a friendly criticism at the request of the author and, whilst from the point of view of a finger print expert there are several little points which may be termed slightly inaccurate, these do not in any way tend to spoil a very interesting and instructive chapter on finger prints.

Mr. Brewster also discusses the subject of placing forged finger prints on documents such as promissory notes, etc., and although he very discreetly refrains from telling his readers how this is actually done, he states this type of offence as being fairly common in India. The one likely comment in this connection is that, if privately taken, finger prints in India with the above object in view are no clearer than some of those seen in China taken for the same purpose, the necessity for

forgery as such should become eliminated as it is certain no expert could identify anyone by finger prints of this kind.

The chapter on typewriting identification upholds the high standard obtaining in the preceding ones. Both the clearness with which readers are told how to identify machines on which specific documents have been written and the points of identification to be looked for leave nothing more to be desired.

The author has, furthermore, rendered great service to students of handwriting by his chapter on Courts and their procedure, examination, cross-examination and re-examination and all who are likely to appear in Courts either as witnesses or Counsel should derive much useful information from their perusal.

The book is concluded with a chapter on document photography and another on the English script. The former is not intended to teach people photography, but only to give advice to photographers in dealing with disputed documents, whilst the latter is extremely useful to expert students and interesting to lay readers. The following statement, for example, may give many a reader much food for thought:- "It has been calculated that the twenty six small letters in the alphabet can be written in 2,016,557,305,632,323,277,920,000 different ways", and the reviewer for one is not prepared to dispute the authenticity of this number.

It would be unfair to close the review without complimenting the author and his photographer on the excellent illustrations throughout the book, which are both helpful and numerous.